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## BAKER'S BASIN OF THE NILE.\*

MR. SAMUEL WHITE BAKER, having spent his life among wild beasts and savage men, and having earned some reputation as a sportsman in Ceylon, became ambitious of distinguishing himself in Africa, where several of his brother Indians had found glory, and some a grave. He desired to solve that geographical problem, which has excited by turns the efforts of the ancients, the modern Egyptians, and several European nations. A noble ground yet remains for explorers; and it is probable that more of these equatorial races are to be discovered, especially towards the western side, where all is blank. But the Nile question may now be considered as definitely settled. Bruce discovered the source of the Blue Nile, previously indicated by the Jesuit missionaries of the middle ages: to Speke and his companion, and to Baker, is due the honour of having placed upon our maps the correct position of the double basin, from which, in the days of Ptolemy, the White Nile was reputed to descend.

"The general principle," writes Mr. Baker, referring to this, "was correct, although the detail was wrong. There can be little doubt that trade had been carried on between the Arabs from the Red Sea and the coast opposite Zanzibar in ancient times, and that the people engaged in such enterprise had penetrated so far into the interior as to have obtained a knowledge of the existence of the two reservoirs: thus may the geographical information originally have been brought into Egypt."

The comparative importance of the two lakes will be best understood from Mr. Baker's own account, which is exceedingly concise and clear:—

"The Nile, cleared of its mystery, resolves itself into comparative simplicity. The actual basin of the Nile is included between about the 22° and 39° east longitude, and from 3° south to 18° north latitude. The drainage of that vast area is monopolised by the Egyptian river. The Victoria and Albert lakes, the two great equatorial reservoirs, are the recipients of all affluents south of the equator; the Albert lake being the reservoir in which are concentrated the entire waters from the south, in addition to tributaries from the Blue Mountains, from the north of the equator. The Albert N'yanza is the great basin of the Nile: the distinction between that and the Victoria N'yanza is, that the Victoria is a reservoir receiving the eastern affluents, and it becomes a starting-point on the most elevated *source*, at the point where the river issues from it at the Ripon Falls; the

\* *The Albert N'yanza, Great Basin of the Nile, and Exploration of the Nile Sources.* By Samuel White Baker, M.A. 2 vols. Macmillan and Co. 1866.

Albert is a reservoir not only receiving the western and southern affluents direct from the Blue Mountains, but it also receives the supply from the Victoria, and from the entire equatorial Nile basin. The Nile, as it issues from the Albert N'yanza, is the *entire* Nile ; prior to its birth from the Albert lake, it is *not* the entire Nile."

He also observes that Speke, "not having visited the lake heard of as the Luta N'zigé, could not possibly have been aware of the vast importance of that great reservoir in the Nile system." It is clear, therefore, that Capt. Speke went a little too far when he asserted that he had *settled* the Nile, though of all the discoverers he is perhaps deserving of the highest place. We shall now briefly follow Mr. Baker through the most charming narrative, and through one of the most splendid journeys ever made by an African explorer.

In April 1861, he sailed up the Nile from Cairo, accompanied by his wife. By the time that he had arrived at Berbèr, a considerable town in lat. 17° 58', he found that he was completely at the mercy of his dragoman, and was convinced that he could not hope for success unless he made himself independent of interpreters. He therefore determined to spend a year in learning Arabic, and also in exploring the affluents to the Nile from the Abyssinian mountains. The narrative of these travels, which will include many sporting adventures, he reserves for future publication. On June 11th, 1862, he arrived at Khartoum, the capital of the Soudan provinces. He describes this town as the seat of a military government of a very irregular kind. A talent for plundering appears to pervade all the military classes, from the private soldier to the Governor-General himself. Owing to this, and to the taxes which are ingeniously laid upon industry, and private enterprise of every kind, the country is not in a flourishing condition ; the trade is poor ; the expenses of freight, owing to the land-journeys which the cataracts cause, are very heavy, and the Soudan, in short, does not pay its expences. But it supplies slaves, and it is for this reason Mr. Baker supposes that it is maintained. However this may be, it is very certain that the Egyptian officials, like the Portuguese in Angola and the Mozambique, secretly favour the transmission of slaves, and throw obstacles in the way of English travellers whose accounts are likely to excite intervention, and the consequent suppression of an unlawful but lucrative branch of commerce. We are not disposed to join in the wild outcry against the European slave trade (now to be numbered among the institutions of the past) which has done so much for the civilisation of the New World, and which has raised the negro to a position of some political importance in the United States. But we cannot see how the Egyptian slave trade is likely to benefit humanity, and it is we think

scarcely worth while that a lawless banditti should be flung into Central Africa to burn villages, murder men, steal cattle, throw difficulties and dangers in the way of our explorers in order that boys, eunuchs, and black girls should be contributed to the harems of the East. Mr. Baker has not exaggerated when he attributes to the slave trade almost all those obstacles which, had he been an ordinary man, would have ruined his expedition. The natives of the country through which he had to pass, had been exasperated by continual razzias, and were opposed to all strangers; it was, therefore, a march through an enemy's country that he had before him, and for this he required an escort of armed men. Undesirous of employing as his body-guard the professional cut-throats of Khartoum, he applied to the Pasha of Egypt, through the British consul at Alexandria, for soldiers and boats. His request was refused. He then hired three vessels or *diahbiah*, and two large noggurs or sailing-barges to convey him to Gondokoro, the navigable limit of the Nile. He engaged forty-five armed men as escort, and forty sailors. He dressed his men in uniform, gave them double-barrelled guns, explained to them the objects of his expedition, informed them that no pluuder would be permitted, and insisted upon their names being registered in the Divan. He set sail, and after many accidents arrived at Gondokoro on the second of February, 1863, after a voyage of about six weeks. Here he found himself in a perfect nest of slavers, the chief of whom his New England readers will be pleased to learn was the son of the American consul at Khartoum, in whose honour possibly it was that the slave-hunters, who arrived at that town, hoisted the American flag at their mast-heads.

In a very short time his forty thieves began to show that they were infected by the atmosphere of the place. They were very angry because he would not let them go cattle-stealing, which it seems is the correct thing to do at Gondokoro. There was a mutiny, and although peace was soon restored the ice had been broken, the white man had been braved, and Baker foresaw that his worst enemies would be the men whom he had taken as his guards. At this juncture Speke and Grant arrived from the interior, and for a moment Baker feared that the Nile sources had been "settled." But when he said to Speke, "Does not one leaf of the laurel remain for me?" he was informed that half of the garland might be won. Accordingly, he started for the interior, but soon his troubles began. Mohammed, an Arab, who had accompanied Speke and Grant, plotted against him. His men began to show signs of discontent; the camels and donkeys were allowed to stray, and the baggage was abandoned to the inroads of white ants. At last the flame burst forth, and Saat, a native boy

who remained faithful to him during the whole journey, informed him of a conspiracy, which had for its objects his murder, and the abandonment of his wife. By a splendid *coup de main* he disarmed fifteen of these wretches, the rest went off slaving, which had probably been their intention from the first. He tried to get others, but without success; he was looked upon as a spy. Just then a party of slave hunters started for the interior; they went off firing guns, and daring him to follow them. He did follow them, accompanied only by his wife, by Saat and Richarn (another native upon whom he could depend), and by his native porters. He soon sighted the watch-fires of the traders' party, and was challenged by the sentries, who threatened to fire on him if he remained near them. This sort of thing went on for some days. Before them lay Ellyria, which was guarded by a narrow mountain pass. He had reason to fear that the slavers would excite the natives against him, and that in the pass his party would be killed. He tried to reach it first, but was outmarched. The two parties came in contact with each other, and the slavers passed him with stern and sulky faces, not making their salaam. Mrs. Baker begged him to speak to Ibrahim, the leader of the expedition; his pride rebelled; and she herself spoke to him in Arabic as he passed by. He stopped, negotiations were commenced, presents were made to him, an alliance was formed. This was the turning-point of his enterprise—thanks to the tact and promptitude of his wife, the opportunity was seized, and the expedition saved. The difficulties with which he had to contend were yet immense; a deadly climate, treacherous companions, and the caprices of a barbarous king. But he was now fairly on his way. From Ellyria they passed to Latooka; on the 23rd of June they left it for the Obbo country, where they were kept prisoners by the rainy season for a long time. They now suffered from repeated attacks of fever; their quinine was exhausted; their horses and donkeys died. He bought and trained three oxen to take their place, and having at length left Obbo, they arrived, after a tedious journey through high grass, swollen streams and dense swamps, at the Somerset River or Victoria White Nile, on the 22nd January, 1864. He was now in Unyoro, and after many delays he was taken to Mrooli, the capital, and admitted into the presence of a brother of Kamrasi, the king, who personated that monarch with such success, that Mr. Baker did not discover the imposture till after his return from the lake, when Kamrasi summoned up courage to receive him.

The lake was reputed to be a long way off, and his porters hearing this ran away. Thus he was left entirely at the mercy of Kamrasi, who, in the person of his younger brother, visited him every day, and

asked for presents. Having got a great deal out of him, and having asked him for everything he had, including his pocket compass, his watch, his pet rifle, and his wife, this potentate at length gave him guides. On their way to the lake Mrs. Baker had a sun-stroke, and was insensible or light-headed during several days. At length, on the 14th of March, they arrived at the summit of a lofty hill, and saw beneath them the great lake glittering in the noon-day sun. To the south, an horizon like that of the sea; to the west, at the distance of fifty or sixty miles, blue mountains rising to the height of 7000 feet. They went down the steep narrow zigzag path which led to the lake. Mrs. Baker tottered from weakness as she walked, and supported herself upon his shoulder. At every twenty paces they stopped to rest. In two hours they reached the level plain at the foot of the cliff. They walked for a mile through some turf meadows, interspersed with trees till they came to the water's edge. There were waves rolling upon a white pebbly beach; they sat down and drank from the sources of the Nile.

We shall not relate the toils and the dangers through which they were forced to pass on their way back, but we must not omit to mention, that weak and weary as they were, they did not turn their steps homewards till they had explored the river which joins the two lakes. This exploit, which could not add to their fame, but which adds so much to the scientific value of their expedition, required perhaps more courage than the discovery of the lake itself.

In this journey, which occupied more than two years (his explorations altogether lasted over four), Mr. Baker had to contend with difficulties of an exceptional kind. Usually the explorer is able to make a fair start, to travel some distance before he is checked by the nostalgia of his men, or by the avarice of some native chieftain. But, as we have seen, his life at the very outset was continually in danger from the men whom he had armed, and it was only by remarkable perseverance that he escaped a failure like that of the unfortunate Miani, who was compelled to return after cutting his name on a tree in the middle of a swamp, and of whom few of our readers will have heard, although he explored to a greater distance than any one who had gone before him. In comparing Mr. Baker's journey with that of others, it must always be remembered that repeated failures had induced the Geographical Society to send their explorers from the eastern side of the coast, a plan first suggested, we believe, by Dr. Beke, and which reaped partial success in the expedition of Burton and Speke; complete success in that of Speke and Grant. In reaching equatorial Africa by the natural or southward route, Mr. Baker

has done that which most travellers and geographers believed to be impossible.

It would be painting the lily to praise Mrs. Baker's gallant conduct. Those only who have travelled in Africa, who have known what it is to sleep in a pestilent atmosphere, and to wake with a hard day's work before one, not strong and refreshed, but with a heavy head and aching bones ; to keep a constant guard over the muscles of the face, and to appear always cheerful however sad one's heart may be ; to resist the continual temptation of returning home ; to lie in the midst of danger in the deep darkness of the night, not daring to sleep, and listening for sounds which one dreads to hear ; or, worst of all, to find oneself at the mercy of a barbarian whom one cannot but despise, and yet who has it in his power to gratify the wish, to crown the labours of a life ; who can bestow immortal fame by granting one permission to visit a certain spot in his dominions, and then to be put off from day to day ; to know " what hell it is in suing long to bide ; " to be balanced every morning between hope and despair, and to be torn by the struggles between prudence and rage. Those only (and they are few) who have gone through all these trials of body and mind, will understand what a young and delicate woman has been able to achieve, and to doubt whether, in past or present time, one of her sex has displayed such a genius for endurance, or such unsubdued energy to the very last, as this heroine of the Nile.

Mr. Baker's book does not contain the immense stores of information which are to be found in Burton's *Lake Regions*, or in Livingstone's massive work—we mean, of course, his first. Fortune has favoured Mr. Baker with a succession of rapid incidents, from his first " situation " at Gondokoro, when he meets Speke and Grant, to the scene of poetical retribution at Khartoum, where, on his return, he discovers the chief of his mutineers, and has him well flogged, to the intense delight of all his readers. Thus his narrative, while bearing the undeniable stamp of truth, is equal in point of construction to a well-contrived work of art. Finding, therefore, these splendid materials beneath his hands, the author has wisely enough avoided long digressions, which, though interesting to the readers of the *Anthropological Review*, who we presume are searchers after solid facts, would have robbed the narrative of half its charms, by checking the action of the story. We do not doubt that Mr. Baker has made many observations upon the natives of Central Africa, which he may perhaps be induced to contribute to the public in another form. At the same time, we must not allow it to be supposed that these volumes are deficient of all information. We shall show that he has not only described with a vivid pen the manners and appearance of native tribes,

but also has made some remarks upon the character and capabilities of the Negro, which deserve the attention of every anthropologist.

The lowest form of the African he encountered appears to have been the Rytch, a tribe on the banks of the White Nile. He says:—

“The people of this tribe are mere apes, trusting entirely to the productions of nature for their subsistence; they will spend hours in digging out field-mice from their burrows, as we should for rabbits. They are the most pitiable set of savages that can be imagined; so emaciated that they have no visible posteriors; they look as though they had been planed off, and their long thin legs and arms give them a peculiar gnat-like appearance.”

The Latooka people he considers to be a branch of the great Galla tribe; they have woolly hair, but have no other Negro features. The same remark applies to the Obbo people; who, however, possess a different type of countenance, and whose language is distinct from that of Latooka. The people of Unyoro, who live under a despotic government, are decidedly superior to either of the above tribes. They wear a kind of bark-cloth, like many of the tribes of Western Africa. “The women were neatly dressed in short petticoats with a double skirt” (this is a refinement of apparel which we have not met with before); “many exposed the bosom, while others wore a piece of bark-cloth arranged as a plaid across the chest and shoulders. This cloth is the produce of a species of fig-tree, the bark of which is stripped off in large pieces, and then soaked in water and beaten with a mallet: in appearance it much resembles corduroy, and is the colour of tanned leather; the finer qualities are peculiarly soft to the touch, as though of woven cotton. Every garden is full of this species of tree, as their cultivation is necessary for the supply of clothing. When a man takes a wife, he plants a certain number of trees, that are to be the tailors of the expected family.”

They also are clever potters and blacksmiths, using the two-handed goat-skin bellows with the up and down movement, which is a contrivance peculiar, we believe, to Africa, but which certainly prevails all over that continent, from the Gaboon to Caffreland, and from the Senegal to the Nile. The natives of this part of Africa do not appear to be distinguished from those of the rest of the continent by any special traits. The custom of fattening young women for marriage, which was described by Speke, is also practised in Northern Guinea, and even in Tripoli, where it is carried to such an extent that girls of a bilious constitution are said to have died under the spoon. In Western Equatorial Africa nothing of the kind is done; but this is on account of the scarcity of food. We never saw but one fat person in Equatorial Africa; and he (a heavy dropsical-looking creature) was shewn to



us as a magnificent production of nature—as the model of what manly beauty ought to be. The taste for corpulence, therefore, may be considered universal throughout Africa.

We have been acquainted with palm-oil traders, and other gentlemen of humble condition and little refined taste, who having lived in Africa all their lives, have ended by admiring the beauty of the black girl, and have declared to us that they could detect no beauty in thin lips, in an attenuated nose, and in long lanky hair; and that an alabaster skin suggested to them no other idea than that of excessive sickness or disease. In the same manner, there is a distinguished explorer, who has so long held communion with the African mind, that whatever judgment he may happen to possess has been completely turned upside down. In Dr. Livingstone's last work, that great traveller may be inspected standing on his head, declaring that black is white; that the Negro has a religion; and that, what is more, his religion is superior to Mohammedanism; that he goes into a corner to pray; that he only sacrifices plants; with various other remarks, which defy criticism by their complete alienation from the truth. Mr. Baker, having spent only four years in Africa, is content to look upon the Negro with a European eye, and does not appear to have any veneration for his character. Among most of the tribes in Western Africa is to be found a belief in a Good and Evil Principle, and some vague ideas of a future life. But, in describing the people of Unyoro, Mr. Baker says:—

“These people, although far superior to the tribes on the north of the Nile in general intelligence, had no idea of a Supreme Being, nor any object of worship; their faith resting upon a simple belief in magic, like that of the natives of Madi and Obbo.”

After this, it will be needless to bestow more time upon the native creed. Upon the character of these people, we will quote an extract from Mr. Baker's diary, which is the more valuable, as it describes what he *felt* at the time:—

“1863, 10th April, Latooka. I wish the black sympathisers in England could see Africa's inmost heart, as I do; much of their sympathy would subside. Human nature, viewed in its crude state, as pictured amongst African savages, is quite on a level with that of the brute, and not to be compared with the noble character of the dog. There is neither gratitude, pity, love, nor self-denial; no idea of duty; no religion; but covetousness, ingratitude, selfishness, and cruelty. All are thieves, idle, envious, and ready to plunder and enslave their weaker neighbours.”

Again he writes:—

“Savages can be ruled by two powers—‘force’ and ‘humbug’; accordingly these are the instruments made use of by those in autho-

rity ; where the 'force' is wanting, 'humbug' is the weapon as a *pis aller*."

Under these circumstances, it is perhaps to the credit of the European missionaries that they have not succeeded better. We are not surprised to find that Mr. Baker expresses the same opinion on this subject that has been expressed by the chief travellers of the Anthropological Society. In describing Richarn, one of his native attendants, he writes :—

"He was brought up from boyhood at the Austrian mission, and he is a genuine specimen of the average results. He told me a few days ago that 'he is no longer a Christian.'"

Again :—

"The (Austrian) mission, having given up the White Nile as a total failure, Herr Morlang sold the whole village and mission station to Koorshid Aga this morning for 3000 piastres, £30 !"

And again :—

"It is a pitiable sight to witness the self-sacrifice that many noble men have made in these frightful countries, without any good results. Near to the grave of Baron Harnier, are those of several members of the mission, who have left their bones in this horrid land ; while not one convert has been made from the mission of St. Croix."

These observations are the more trustworthy, since Mr. Baker appears to be as earnest a detester of slavery, and a lover of Christianity, as Dr. Livingstone himself. But so deeply has Mr. Baker been impressed, by personal and painful experience, with the degradation of the Negro, that he seems almost inclined to believe that they are pre-Adamites, and properly belong to a period when the earth produced monsters. We will not criticise this theory, but applaud the modesty with which he says that the ethnology of Central Africa is "completely beyond my depth." It is only those who are smatterers upon the subject, who would venture to say otherwise. The fact is, that we know nothing of Africa. To understand a people, one must first understand their language, and one must live among them for some time, and one must also possess some talent for reading human nature. We need scarcely say that the comparative anthropology of Africa can only be studied, with some hope of obtaining positive results, when all the different tribes have been described by persons who are qualified for the task as stated above. As it is, immense nations have never seen the face of a white man ; others have been just passed through, and viewed merely on the surface. The day has not yet arrived for theory ; the anthropologist must content himself with collecting facts.

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